

DISMANTLING THE EAST–WEST DICHOTOMY

Essays in honour of Jan van Bremen

Edited by Joy Hendry and Heung Wah Wong

Dismantling the East–West Dichotomy

There has been a tendency to dichotomise the world into ‘East’ and ‘West’, as though the world were in fact so divided. This book demonstrates that such a division has become a redundant exercise that is inappropriate and even dangerous in the contemporary world. Adopting theoretical, ethnographic, personal, regional and historical perspectives, and drawing inspiration from the work of the late Jan van Bremen, it systematically dismantles such divisions. At the same time, it proposes new ways forward for the field of anthropology, offering a wealth of regional and global perspectives as exhibited by contemporary scholarship. This timely and important book, fit for the true scholar it sets out to commemorate, provides a valuable examination of the current state of the academic study of Japan anthropology, demonstrating how progress achieved in anthropological work on Japan can provide a model for good practice elsewhere.

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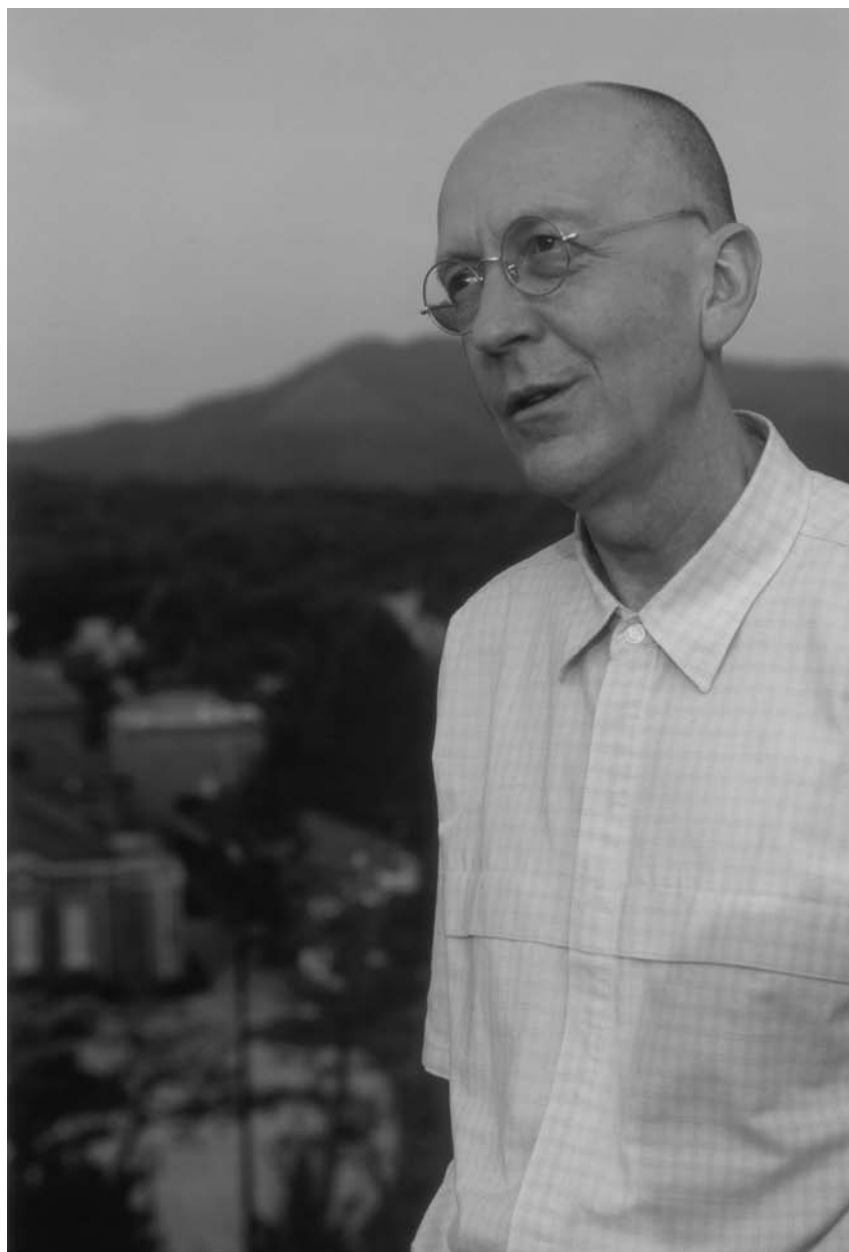
Akitoshi Shimizu is Professor Emeritus of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, who is currently doing research on ideological mobilisations of anthropological knowledge during the wartime 1930s and 1940s in Japan. Together with Dr Jan van Bremen, he co-edited two books: *Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia and Oceania* (Curzon, 1999), and *Wartime Japanese Anthropology in Asia and the Pacific* (National Museum of Ethnology, 2003).

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Biography

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Married: 17 September 1968, to Keiko Itō, who died 2 December, 2005

Two sons, Maerlant and Jirō

Education and Academic Positions

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Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies: 1973–4

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Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, December 1996

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Offices and contributions to professional societies

European Association for Japanese Studies: Secretary 1988–94, Interim director 1994.

Japan Anthropology Workshop: co-founder, 1984, EAJS liaison officer 1991–4, Secretary-General and Newsletter Editor, 1999–2005; RoutledgeCurzon Series, founder and member, Editorial Board

Netherlands Association for Japanese Studies: Vice-president 1987–91

Leiden Group for Japanese Studies, established under the Erasmus Programme of the European Community, founding-director 1987–91

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Anthropology of Japan in Japan: Member Advisory Council 2004–5

Part I

Introduction

1 Anthropology in Japan:

A Model for Good Practice in a Global Arena?

Joy Hendry

Introduction: How this book came about

At a meeting of the Japan Anthropology Workshop (JAWS), held in Hong Kong in early 2005, a plenary session was held on the theme East meets West in Japanese Anthropology. It followed a style which had been initiated by Jan van Bremen, then Secretary General of JAWS, and Bill Kelly, local organiser of the 2002 JAWS meeting at Yale, where a few speakers gave short position essays on a specific subject to an audience which was then invited to respond. As before, plenty of time was set aside for discussion, and a fruitful debate ensued. The theme was addressed, but a recurring comment, also echoing some of the presentations, was that this East-West dichotomy had reached a point of declining usefulness.

The scholars present had travelled from several different countries, they originated from many more, and their training was also quite varied. Although they were focusing their presentations on Japan, they were often addressing a much more diverse audience than they would in their usual place of work, and the big plenary workshop offered a special chance to turn over ideas that reflected the heady mix that the conference comprised. Lola Martinez (Spanish-American-Japan-UK) pointed out that the line of demarcation anyway shifts historically – from the UK, the East was for long a lot nearer than Japan, Mexican participant Genaro Castro-Vazquez complained that he finds no place in such a division of the world, and session chair, Dixon Wong (Hong Kong-UK-Japan), suggested that complaining from the East of the hegemony of Western systems of thought merely perpetuates that hegemony.

Most of those offering position pieces – Harumi Befu, Takami Kuwayama, Okpyo Moon and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney – were anyway scholars who crossed the division in one way or another, being born in one part of a conceivable East-West divide, but trained and/or teaching in another. I was the last remaining member of the panel, and although my division of birth and ancestry was no greater than that between different countries of the UK, I also work in Japan, and I felt able to contribute to the debate. Following an unpublished article by Shinji Yamashita, I had

suggested that anthropologists, who almost by definition find themselves in an in-between situation, are in a good position to build a new, co-operative way of thinking that could be much more value free. At the time, I had no idea that this would turn out to be a theme so prevalent amongst my colleagues, but I now see it as the major contribution of this book.

Some fruitful ideas were germinated in this session, and as Jan van Bremen had devised the theme but was unable to attend due to declining health, we decided to think about making a volume to commemorate his years as JAWS Secretary General. Dixon arranged for a video recording of the session to be made, we collected a long list of potential contributors, and on my way home I travelled to Jan's home in Amsterdam with the proposals. We watched the video, discussed the themes, and together devised a new title that would better reflect the outcome. We also considered a few other people who might make useful contributions, and I sat down at once and dispatched e-mail messages to everyone to invite them to write position pieces on the topic, kept short in order to include as many ideas as possible.

The response was fast, and truly remarkable, for our list of contributors not only includes many well known names in the field, but their topics neatly link in with ideas of new anthropologies already cutting away at the edge of thinking way beyond the tired old East-West divide. Moreover, and in quite an unplanned though hardly surprising way, the material presented builds on Jan's recent work and carries it forward. A list of his publications forms part of the Bibliography, and it demonstrates clearly how far his thinking and his scholarly activities had already proceeded down the road being advocated in this book. Sadly, he did not live to see the volume published, but he did see the Contents and the abstracts, and I suspect that he realised better than we did at the time how well this book would reflect the work he had been doing. He certainly approved!

The volume has thus turned out to be a fine tribute to the man it was designed to honour, as well as bringing together some of the work he was involved in. It offers an innovative approach to Jan's field of anthropology from the place he did most of his work, and this innovation is reflected in its position piece style. This format was discussed at the business meeting of the conference as a good way to promote discussion among students of some of the basic tenets and terms of the subject. As an accessible medium to the next generation, it will also pay homage to a man who helped so many people to proceed with their own careers that he sometimes damaged his own. This book allows us to acknowledge that generosity, and to mark out an appreciation of the true value of such genuine scholarship.

The Content of the Book

The essays are presented in six main sections, with a round-up analysis by my co-editor Dixon Wong. The book has been laid out so that it may be dipped into at any point, the sections serving to order in a reasonably sensible

way a set of essays that are full of cross-references as they approach and address the theme from a variety of perspectives. All the essays address the theme more or less directly, and most demonstrate in some way or another how the wider anthropological world can benefit from the study of Japan, or study in Japan. Critical essays may be found throughout the book, several offer ways out of the bind within which this dichotomy places us, and some demonstrate that we have been engaging in practices that override the dichotomy for years already. Readers may select a particular essay, or a section, depending on their own interests, and those who want to rush straight for the new directions study in Japan can bring to anthropology may be best satisfied by starting at the end. That said, let me lay out the rationale for our ordering of the essays and a taste of some of the gems to follow.

The first section contains some of the most theoretical essays, selected to demonstrate the fundamental need for this dismantling theme. Ohnuki-Tierney was the keynote speaker at our conference, and we offer her the opening words in deference to this position, but her argument strikes at the heart of the matter. Using Japanese history to justify her case, she sets out to 'do away altogether' with the concept of 'hybridity', on the grounds that it presupposes a prior notion of 'pure' culture that has never existed. Instead, she argues, Japanese (and indeed any) culture is constituted by a process of continuous dialectic between internal and external factors. Shimizu's essay takes this theoretical stance to an more abstract level, examining the whole notion of dichotomising, and arguing that multiple dichotomies must be set up to represent the internal and external angles that have been used to place Japan within the wider world.

The next two essays introduce the anthropologist to the scene, and although both use Japanese materials to illustrate their arguments, the points they make are again more general. Goodman's theme is the relationship between individual researchers and the societies in which they work, and he argues that their underlying theoretical models have a far greater impact on their research than the variables such as nationality and ethnicity that have dominated the reflexive literature. Martinez, on the other hand, examines the changing relationship between Japanese and non-Japanese anthropologists working in Japan and suggests an important contribution that these developments make to the wider field in which we all work. Lock's essay, the last in this section, puts the anthropological approach itself under scrutiny in an examination of the popularisation of biomedical knowledge in a 'postgenomic' era, and she argues for a judicious consideration of both biological and cultural factors in understanding diversity that 'is not amenable to dichotomisation'.

The second section of the book turns immediately to the more concrete. First, Kuwayama examines the contemporary nature of anthropological fieldwork, held up against the more co-operative research of Japanese folklorists. Nakamaki reviews examples of co-operation between Japanese and

non-Japanese scholars that are so long-standing he describes them as a tradition in Japanese anthropology. Sedgwick, who has been part of one of these projects, plays down the diversity in method, wherever anthropology is carried out, emphasising instead the importance of those personal contacts in a field situation. The last two essays in this section illustrate the results of such fieldwork, both concerned with Japan looking out, transforming itself, as much as fieldworkers coming in. Yoshiko Nakano's essay examines the fate of Japanese rice-cookers in the hands of skilful Hong Kong intermediaries, and Guichard-Anguis looks at the Asianisation of 'traditional' Japanese accommodation.

A personal perspective becomes the theme of the third section of the book, starting with an amusing essay by European-born Peter Knecht who examines his position in various states of ambiguity as a long-term resident and employee of Japan. Castro-Vázquez, on the other hand, focuses on the rather more serious implications of the system of (non-)classification for Latin Americans living there. Creighton raises an issue familiar to many non-Americans who get classified as undifferentiated Westerners by examining her own situation as a US citizen, born and raised, but working in a city in Canada with quite a large Japanese population. She touches on the extent to which expectations in one society may elicit a reading of another that is inappropriate from the perspective of the third, an issue also taken up by Heung Wah (Dixon) Wong from a different locale. He critiques his own work, as a Chinese anthropologist trying to understand Japanese company employees in Hong Kong, a position he argues gave him no special advantage, since he found himself using a model rather alien to both traditions.

The following section perseveres with this regional approach, at first turning the focus to other parts of Asia, and then moving further afield. Korean anthropologist Okpyo Moon, who also presented in the plenary session, makes the important point that interpretations of Japan that might appeal in an international context are not necessarily those that go down well in Korea. She criticises Japanese anthropologists for leaning too far towards the Western hegemony, and proposes that a breakthrough can and should be made by incorporating other Asian perspectives into the scene and trying to create a common platform for exchanging ideas and sharing interests. The following essay, by Bruce White, suggests that at least young people in Japan may be taking steps in this direction already, and both look towards an essay in the last section, by Lynne Nakano, which advocates seeking common ground in a wider audience for anthropological scholarship.

William W. Kelly's essay looks at first as though it might seek to defend the apparent dominance of the US in what they there call Japan Anthropology, but actually it turns out to offer an interesting inside perspective on the subject. Those in the field are large in number, and he offers explanations for this, but apparently they don't feel as powerful as outsiders might imagine, and he argues that the subject has always been more cosmopolitan than the figures would suggest. Martin's essay on expatriate Japanese

housewives in the UK would seem to confirm a cosmopolitanism for the 'global citizens' some of our Japanese informants have become, and she argues that these ones also have a powerful role to play in breaking down that old East–West division.

Historical aspects of the problem form the focus of the next section, and the first essay looks at some citizens claimed by Japan who have for long confounded the East–West dichotomy. Since the sixteenth century, when the first European encounter with the Ainu took place, Refsing records that they were classified as 'white', a perception that has persisted until recent times, though the actual evidence is thin. An odd situation arose in the nineteenth century, then, when Japan used a European model to 'colonise' the Ainu, who if 'white' should of course have been 'superior' and more 'civilised' than their 'yellow' neighbours were. Asquith's essay addresses another aspect of nineteenth-century thinking when she looks at the social ecology theory of Kinji Imanishi who had been portrayed as a nationalistic anti-Darwinian in suggesting a co-operative rather than competitive explanation of natural partitioning. Asquith's work reveals a lot more 'Western' influence in this 'Eastern' idea than had previously been recognised.

Kreiner makes a similar point about some of the huge volume of Japanese art works lodged in European museums. Dating back to the sixteenth century, these collections must have influenced European perceptions of the Japanese, he argues, but of course many of them were specifically made for European consumption so they may also exhibit Japanese understandings of Europe. A nice illustration of Ohnuki-Tierney's process of continuous dialectic between internal and external factors. Ackermann's essay in this section – based on a recent experience with young Germans and Japanese – takes a rather different stand. He argues that the powerful influence of history in forming basic categories relating to 'religious family rituals' requires a very pragmatic approach when individuals from differing backgrounds come together to exchange views.

Towards a New Anthropology

By the last section of the book, the East–West divide has been thoroughly dismantled, and although the essays here continue with the theme, they also bring together some rather powerful suggestions about how anthropology at large may learn from the Japanese case. The proposals here, with little formal consultation, actually dovetail very nicely with the thrust of my own initial presentation which argued that the anthropological work we have all been carrying out in Japan can provide a model for good practice beyond our own regional specialisation. The idea is based partly on the good relations that exist between inside and outside anthropologists of Japan, and partly because the mutual representations of Japan by anthropologists of outside countries, and those countries by Japanese anthropologists, are relatively equal and undifferentiated in hierarchical terms (Hendry 1997).

My own recent research (Hendry 2005) has actually been away from Japan, in post-colonial situations that have been the more traditional fields of anthropological fieldwork, and the experience has made me acutely aware of the advantages I have had working in Japan. Many of the people I have been working with were expected to die out by my predecessors in the field, and their material culture was appropriated by our museum colleagues, working for the nations that have been built around them. They did not die out, of course, as Sahlins (1999b) has noted so eloquently, and I have been examining ways in which they are reclaiming their own representations in Culture Centres, and redefining themselves by 'indigenizing modernity' (ibid.). But there is considerable residual hard feeling for anthropologists.

Japan has much experience of 'indigenizing modernity', of course, and of redefining itself *vis-à-vis* the outside world. From the late nineteenth century, it worked hard to *join* the peoples it saw as powerful, 'attempting an empire', as Mathews (2004) put it, imposing assimilation policies on the Ainu (and the 'Ryukyuan'), and sending anthropologists out to work on 'others' who fell within their expanding frontiers. After its defeat in World War II, Japan suffered occupation and being demeaned by the rest of the world. As it recovered, and surprised the world with its success, it also became the object of study by others, and in the heyday of *Nihonjinron*, reached a pinnacle of pronouncements that 'only we Japanese can understand ourselves'. I am reminded of this as I watch people around the world setting up courses in Indigenous Studies, Native Studies, Aboriginal Studies, and so forth, while they reject the anthropologists who have written about them over the years.

This is not what happened in Japan, of course, and we outside anthropologists are made welcome, though we are expected to register at a Japanese university, and consult our colleagues who are working on their home territory. We are also invited to take part in local projects, as Nakamaki's essay in this book makes clear, and several volumes in the bibliography demonstrate. Indeed, it is by working co-operatively like this that we make best progress, as Teigo Yoshida (1987) pointed out many years ago at the JAWS meeting in Jerusalem. I would like to argue that such activity makes an excellent model for a new kind of anthropology that might eventually even draw in those people who are still smarting from the disadvantage at which they feel their 'native' position leaves them.

In this way of thinking, Japan itself is 'somewhere in-between', just as Yamashita argues for Japanese anthropology in the first essay of the last section of this book. His proposal to move towards an 'interactive anthropology', and create an 'open forum in which the various anthropologies in the world can meet together on an equal footing', is very appropriate. Although anthropological traditions in the world may vary between countries, he points out that anthropology is also transnational, and those of us who practice it should not represent nations, but remain 'somewhere in-between'. The next essay, by Mathews, formalises this proposal by arguing